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horseshoe lake

CONSERVATION AREA



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THE AREA

Horseshoe Lake Conservation Area, in Alexander County 7 miles northwest of Cairo, is popularly known for its large flock of wintering Canada geese. The 7,901-acre area includes a 2,400-acre shallow lake.

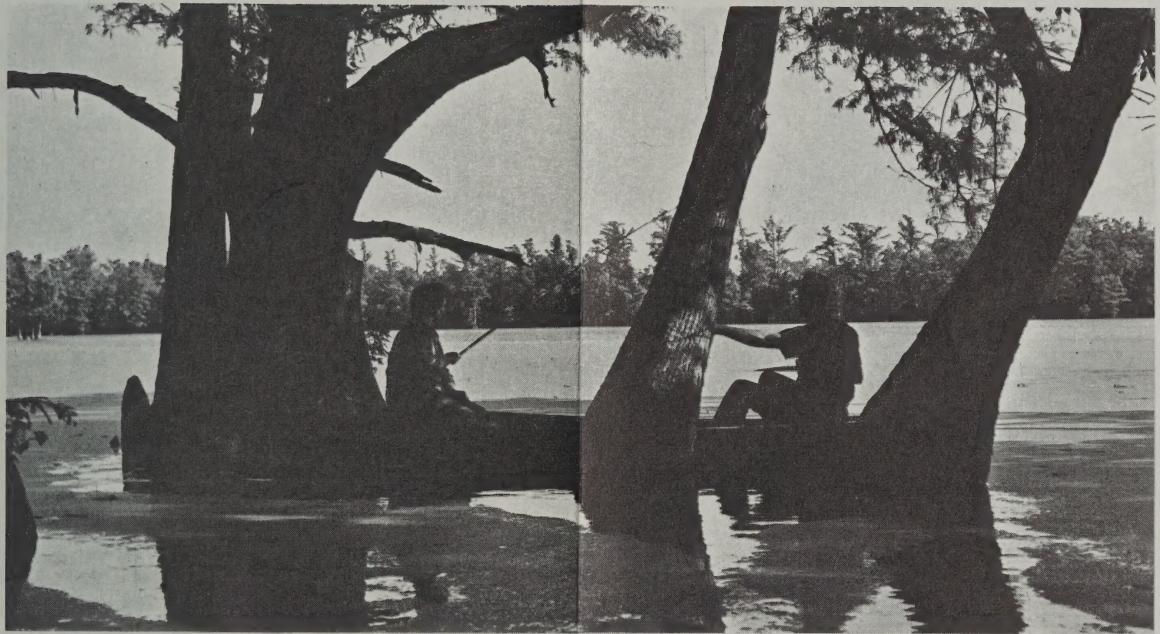
THE LAKE

Horseshoe Lake, noted for its large stands of cypress, tupelo gum and swamp cottonwood, is a beautiful body of water. Prior to 1930, the lake was subject to moisture conditions of the year and went partially dry during July and August of most years.

In 1927 the Illinois Department of Conservation purchased 49 acres and continued purchasing tracts around the lake, including Horseshoe Island, for a sanctuary for Canada geese. In 1929, a stoplog spillway structure was constructed. About 10 years later a concrete, fixed spillway was constructed and began to function about 1940, establishing an only slightly fluctuating 2,400-acre lake with a maximum depth of six feet and a 20 mile shoreline. This reduced the zone of intermittent flooding to some two feet in elevation, which prior to this work was flooded as much as six to eight feet.

The Canada goose flock began using Horseshoe Island in 1928 when approximately 1,000 birds arrived. The population increased to over 40,000 in 1943-44; however, due to mediocre management and lack of harvest controls, the population was reduced to an estimated 22,000 in 1946-47. At this time, the season in southern Illinois was closed for a short period followed by closing 18,000 acres of public and private lands to hunting. Then the refuge management improved and harvest controls were instigated. The present wintering population is in excess of 100,000, plus 80,000 at Union County, 70,000 at Crab Orchard and 40,000 in nearby Ballard County, Kentucky.

Although Horseshoe Lake has a large population of geese during the winter months, it receives much attention from fishermen, especially those willing to forget their deep water techniques long enough to learn how to fish in shallow water. The most popular fishing technique here is bucktailing, apparently developed at this lake, but highly successful in many other lakes.



Bucktail Fishing: A bucktail is a small lead-head jig which is tied with several short strands of hair. Although the lure's name implies that deer hair is used, bucktails are tied with calf hair. Bucktail fishing involves the use of a fly rod with monofilament line. The lure is fished a foot or more deep, either bounced up and down or moved around to simulate the swimming of a minnow. No bobber is used with the bucktail; it is fished tightline. When a fish hits, the angler will feel the strike.

The Refuge Zone is on the island, the lake and all surrounding state property not designated as public hunting ground. A variety of food requirements such as green pasture and grain crops are produced for goose food and research programs including banding operations are carried out. At this time, approximately 50,000 birds have been trapped, banded and released.

NATURAL SCENE

The natural setting of Horseshoe Lake Conservation Area is reminiscent of the deep south. It is dominated by the bald cypress, tupelo gum and swamp cottonwood trees which border the lake. The southern theme is also reflected in the total flora and fauna of the area which is typical of that found in a southern swampland.

Some of the more notable natural attractions are the waterfowl and the bald eagle populations present during the fall and winter months. The beautiful red buckeye shrubs flower abundantly during April as do the wild lotus in June.

There are several large tracts of native southern hardwood forests on the area. Two of the larger undisturbed stands are dedicated as Illinois Nature Preserves and are managed as natural areas for scientific research, educational use and public visitation.

FACILITIES

Picnicking: Four picnic areas are scattered around the area with convenient parking lots. Picnic tables and park stoves are available. There is a playground near the spillway. Eight drinking hydrants or fountains are around the lake.

Concession Stand: On the west side of the lake, the concession stand has a variety of light refreshments and is open during warm months.

Hunting: The hunting area for Canada geese can accommodate 100 persons per day by permit only. Interested hunters may reserve a days hunting by applying to the Springfield office for a per-

mit. The east side of the Horseshoe Lake area is also open to squirrel hunting during a portion of the season. Consult the park ranger or refuge manager for information concerning shooting times and opening dates for hunting.

Fishing and Boating: The lake contains bluegill, sunfish, crappie, largemouth bass and channel catfish. Six launching ramps are conveniently located around the lake. Nine boat docks accommodate either rental or private boats. There is a 10 h.p. motor limit. No fishing is permitted from October 15 to March 1.

Camping: The area will accommodate 50 tents and 100 trailers. There is electricity and a sanitary station for trailers. Water hydrants and pit toilets are conveniently located.

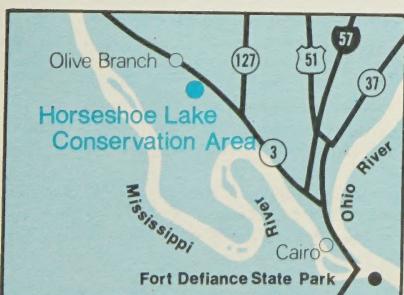
FOR YOUR INFORMATION . . .

Admittance will not be granted groups of 25 or more persons to any state park or conservation area unless permission from the park ranger has been secured to use the facilities. It is also required that groups of minors have adequate supervision and that at least one responsible adult accompany each group not exceeding 15 minors. All pets must be on a leash.

Numerous state parks and memorials are within easy access of every part of the state. Lodges, cabins and dining rooms are important features of Illinois Beach, Starved Rock, Pere Marquette, White Pines Forest and Giant City. Reservations for lodging should be made with lodge managers.

All state parks are open the year round. When weather conditions necessitate the closing of park roads during freezing and thawing periods, access to park facilities is by foot only.

For more details, contact Park Ranger, Box 77, Miller City, Illinois 62962, phone 618/776-5281. For information on other Illinois sites, write the Department of Conservation, Information/Education Division, State Office Building, Springfield, 62706.



Park Map

